

PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2, AUTUMN 1977

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DESIGN FOR NEIGHBORHOOD WELFARE SERVICES

Who should 'own' local welfare services? What social services should be centralized or decentralized, and when and how? What new models of local welfare organization offer prospects for more effective delivery? How can social service planning be enabled to anticipate, rather than react to, events? These and related questions are discussed by the author, based on his experience as a practitioner and as a teacher. A faculty member of the School of Social Welfare at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Dr. Jaffe was formerly Director of the Welfare Department of Jerusalem Municipality and a member of the Prime Minister's Committee on Disadvantaged Youth.

Planners and administrators of Israeli welfare services have become very alarmed in recent years over the apparent failure of present neighborhood welfare arrangements to provide adequate front-line services. Lately, the issue has also become politically important as electoral reform will require that mayors be elected on public appeal and performance rather than being parachuted to office by party decisions alone. Moreover, the rapid urbanization of Israel's population and continued concentration of social problems in its cities has led to greater government sensitivity to grass-roots and neighborhood problems. Both of these developments are sharpened by more active expression of dissatisfaction of residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods, emerging at times in forms of violence and social disruption.

Any serious attempt to experiment with basic services to neighborhoods in trouble cannot avoid looking into policy and planning at both the micro and macro levels, i.e. the municipal and national levels of government. Much of the band-aid, 'one-shot' local 'project' approaches must, sooner or later, find their place in local or national welfare policy arrangements. The catalyst for new policy can begin at any place in the cycle: neighborhood residents, volunteer groups, local government, or national agencies. But for new programs to take root, to obtain cooperation and resources, they must usually be part of an overall policy strategy agreed upon by the different levels of government which control and allocate resources.

In the welfare field, the late Minister of Social Welfare, Michael Chazani, was keenly aware of the need for reorganizing neighborhood welfare services. In February, 1975, he commissioned two task forces to work separately, but simultaneously, to propose new models for local services¹. He also asked a handful of independent welfare planners to write separate papers on the subject². Each of the committees endorsed the principle of separating income maintenance services from the rehabilitation and personal services, although they did not recommend that local welfare offices transfer income maintenance to the National Insurance Institute entirely (which is clearly where it belongs). One committee (the Katan Committee) proposed that local social workers be out-posted to local agencies, such as the mother-child ('tipat chalav') neighborhood health centers, housing agencies, kindergartens, schools, community centers, and other local services, where they could give

on-the-spot social work service in their host agencies while referring on-going treatment situations to a special neighborhood treatment and counseling center³. The other committee (the Salzberg Committee) proposed setting up multidisciplinary neighborhood 'teams', headed by team managers, to handle local welfare problems, backed up, more or less, by a district welfare office apparatus⁴. The recommendations of the second committee seem to deal more with streamlining existing welfare office organization, particularly on the lines of an earlier reorganization in Jerusalem implemented by this writer in the early 1970s.⁵ Both committees endorsed brokerage work as an integral function of social workers under any organizational framework, irregardless of the fact that the boundaries between brokerage and treatment have yet to be clearly defined⁶.

The two committees seemed greatly divided on the issue as to whether social services should be 'free-standing', i.e. independent, self-contained, or integrated into host agencies and services. What is developing, de facto, in Israeli social work is a combination of the two approaches, where social workers are 'out-posted' by the municipal welfare department into host agencies such as schools, mother-child health centers, community centers, and day care centers, while the district welfare office is sovereign over these workers, and provides their salaries as well as the resources which they allocate to clients. However, there is still a need to experiment with the 'free-standing' and the 'integrated' model of local welfare service organization in their pure forms, and particularly with the integrated model where social workers are directly employed by host agencies, provide services as part of the professional team in the agency, and are completely detached from the authority of the local welfare office⁷.

The search for new models of local welfare organization has led a number of municipalities to reorganize their welfare departments, more or less along the lines developed by the two Committees noted above, and with the prodding of the Ministry of Welfare. It seems to me, however, that none of the present 'reorganizations' go far enough towards change, or towards more radical experimentation with service delivery systems.

An excellent opportunity for looking at possible changes in neighborhood service delivery arose when the Mayor of Tel Aviv established 'Project ESHEL' (Organization of Citizens' Services) in 1974⁸. The purpose of the project was to develop, in a disadvantaged neighborhood, an integrated network of municipal services with feed-back from citizens, and escalated social planning for the neighborhood in the areas of child development, public services, schools, recreation, and family and community services. An initial survey of potential neighborhoods for inclusion in the Project located nine clearly disadvantaged neighborhoods⁹, and in the final analysis Neveh Eliezer (also known as Neveh Shalem) was selected in January, 1976 as the specific planning area. This is a neighborhood of nearly 1,300 families at the south-east corner of Tel Aviv, with a population of over 5,000 souls. The residents are primarily middle-eastern Jews, former slum dwellers transferred nearly 15 years ago from the nearby Kfar Shalem, Hatikva and Shabazi neighborhoods. It was the most overcrowded area of all the 9 neighborhoods noted above, with a density of 12.3 square meters per person¹⁰. The housing, primarily large public housing complexes ('blocks') is in serious disrepair, and the social

problem 'spin-off' is apparent in the fact that 90 children were placed away from home last year, over 300 children were in the care of welfare workers, nearly 250 families are receiving monthly welfare grants, and 308 children received day care subsidies from the welfare office¹¹. The neighborhood abounds with large families trying to handle their needs under very difficult economic and social conditions. The 'blocks' are bounded on the north by 5 new buildings for young couples, by new public housing projects and a small well-off Yemenite community on the south side, by a middle-income housing tract to the east, and by the fields and deserted buildings of Kfar Shalem to the West.

Facilities Needed

In brief, Neveh Eliezer has all the markings of a low-income, disadvantaged neighborhood. The nearest welfare office is half an hour's ride to downtown Tel Aviv by bus, which does not encourage contact between the clientele and the welfare system. On the other hand, the residents have positive comments about the mother-child health clinic, the day-care centers (run by women's organizations), and the club for the aged – all located in the neighborhood. The hut which houses the youth activities is pitifully small, understaffed, totally inadequate, and needs to be replaced by a community center. The large empty tract behind the hut could have been used as a sports field, but unfortunately it is in the process of becoming a huge open plaza crowned with a fountain and 'waterfall'. Since this paper primarily concentrates on models for social service delivery, it must suffice to note the need for immediate provision of a multi-functional community center, thinning out of overcrowded families, basic interior repairs in the public housing projects (sewage pipes, stairways, toilet facilities, etc.), and additional subsidized day care facilities for 'non-welfare' clients.

Social Service Ghettos

Much of the planning for Neveh Eliezer and other similar communities of second-generation Israelis transferred from prior slum dwellings has resulted in the creation of low-income ghettos, which, devoid of sophisticated leadership and physically detached from middle-income neighborhoods, tend to get left behind in the competition for public services and resources. In my opinion, the physical and social planning for Neveh Eliezer should be linked to the new, lower-middle income housing area being built to the east of the neighborhood rather than simply beefing-up services in the neighborhood itself. Past experience has shown that services exclusively for the poor are often poor themselves, and have less capacity for sustaining good quality over time. Services for mixed socio-economic groups have a better chance for competing for resources than ghetto services. This may also partially account for the relative weakness of 'residents committees' in slum neighborhoods.

Population Catchment Areas

One of the major problems in welfare planning is deciding what, when and how to decentralize or to centralize services. The present catchment areas for welfare offices in Israel are often arbitrary and poorly defined, particularly in the large cities, and the numerous definitions of 'neighborhood' do not easily

enable us to use the neighborhood as the basic unit, geographically or otherwise, for social planning.

It is clearly evident that we have to define catchment areas for social services quite differently for different types of services.¹² For example, financial assistance or income maintenance functions should be provided on a city-wide basis, in one central office, and not as a neighborhood or district service. Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the other large cities do not need more than one office for determining eligibility and for administering income maintenance payments. On the other hand, social services for the aged, children and the handicapped, and counselling to families should be provided to smaller population areas. Thus, in my view, we might start experimenting with decentralization by locating these social welfare services in the same buildings that house the mother-child health clinics. In every 'neighborhood' where the clinics exist, and in the new ones where they are about to be built, an extra wing or floor might be added for the social services. There is no reason why municipal health services should not team up with municipal welfare services, provided the income maintenance functions are removed from the welfare services.

In addition to decentralizing present welfare work, the pairing of social services with community health services might eventually lead to destigmatization of the welfare services, and to closer cooperation between the health and welfare networks. This recommendation should be implemented universally, without regard to the socio-economic level of the population in the catchment area. Every mother-child health center should have a social welfare service 'wing'.

Another model for providing 'neighborhood' social services could take the form of a 'Family Life Center' or 'Human Resources Center' or 'Multiple Service Center'¹³. The basic idea behind these terms is that a variety of services are offered, under one roof, to a 'medium-sized' (e.g. between 20,000 to 50,000 population) catchment area. On different days during the week, area residents can meet with representatives of major agencies which provide a wide range of services to the public, not only social services. For example, the Family Life Center would be a service 'supermarket' having predetermined office hours for marriage counselling, financial counselling, well-baby and family planning clinic, volunteer services, day care, public housing, drug counselling, advice to the elderly, employment counselling, national insurance counselling, rehabilitation counselling, etc. Agencies that are responsible for delivering these services, whether municipal, national or volunteer agencies, would send their representatives to the Center, rent office space, and receive clients by appointment or walk-in. The Center could be housed in store-front buildings, or in an especially constructed or rented office building. The Center would bring a range of services into the neighborhood, either as a 'mailbox' for action at the main office of the participating agencies, or for direct provision of service to clients.

Either of these two models could be implemented in a neighborhood like Neveh Eliezer and the surrounding catchment area. One thing, however, is certain: the lack of a social work facility today in Neveh Eliezer should not be perpetuated.

Ownership of Welfare Services

Closely related to the issue of organizational models for local welfare services is the question of who should be responsible for the policy, program implementation and funding of these services¹⁴. The present model, on the surface, assumes that the municipalities are responsible for employing social work staff and carrying out the work of the welfare office according to policy guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Social Welfare. Theoretically, local implementation is supervised by the Ministry's district office. A minimum of 75% of the municipality's welfare costs are covered by the Ministry, but the service is essentially a municipal service.

This arrangement has raised problems which may now require serious remedies and a search for new models. It is not clear, for example, who actually 'owns' the local welfare program, who is accountable to the public for its functioning, and who should make policy¹⁵. The municipalities still show great difficulty in providing their 25% of the welfare budget, tend to place welfare far down the list of municipal priorities, and welfare often falls victim to municipal coalition politics and personality conflicts. The Ministry of Welfare is in the rather ludicrous position of footing the major part of the welfare bill, with very little power to dictate how the work should be done. Even concerning experimentation with changes in municipal welfare organization, the Ministry of Welfare often stands hat in hand before municipal mayors and city councils. The result is often absence of leadership, the passing of responsibility between the local and national authorities, and poor, conservative planning and implementation of programs.

In my view, the time has come to seriously consider nationalizing welfare services at the municipal level. The municipalities now pay relatively little for these services although the need for them is rapidly growing as Israel continues to move towards urbanization and industrialization. Nationalization of municipal welfare services would allow for better planning and implementation, would tone down internal political problems and provide more continuity. It would also bring the issue of welfare policy, accountability, and financing closer to the Cabinet level of government. Perhaps experimentation with nationalized social welfare services could be conducted in a few selected municipalities or geographical districts, such as Tel Aviv, which would be large enough in scope to study the efficiency and feasibility of this approach.

Coordination of Social Services

Of all the day-to-day frustrations encountered by neighborhood residents, one of the most serious is the lack of coordination evident between various municipal departments and other providers of social services. Neveh Eliezer, again, represents a classic example of this shortcoming. Four major departments of the Tel Aviv municipality provide separate services in the neighborhood: social work; culture, youth and sports; public health; and education. Each department has its own agenda and competes for funds, without any well-coordinated, institutionalized mechanism for interdepartmental feedback and planning. No one, not even the neighborhood committee, has any concept of a master plan for the neighborhood and a clear idea as to the best division of labor to implement such a plan. The entire

approach is vertical, and authoritative; separate departmental decisions are made centrally, with filtration of the implementation down to the neighborhood level.

More often than not, the neighborhood residents committees, whether democratically elected or not, are perceived as obstacles to planning rather than as partners. There is both a sense of fear for the potential power of the neighborhood committee, and an instinctive sense of respect, since this is the only existing instrument for direct contact and relationship with the community's residents.

It seems to me that a special attempt must be made by municipal and national authorities to strengthen neighborhood level agency coordination and to secure the participation of neighborhood residents in local planning. These two goals may be accomplished by establishing Neighborhood Planning Councils, composed of representatives of the municipal and volunteer agencies operating in the area, as well as representatives of the neighborhood committee. The Neighborhood Planning Council would meet at least once a month in the neighborhood to discuss and plan local services and evaluate their functioning. The administrative operation of these Councils should be funded generously by the municipality, with feedback directly to the Mayor and the heads of the municipal departments involved.

The second level of coordination, namely the municipal department level, cannot be guaranteed unless serious structural changes take place regarding the organization of the departments. What seems needed at this point is a new Community Services Department, under one director, which would combine the present social work, health, sport, and education departments under one roof. This new arrangement might lead to more coordinated services and planning at the central level and, hopefully, facilitate the same result at the neighborhood level. This proposal for a single Community Services Department might exclude education in the beginning, but certainly the health, welfare, and the culture, youth and sports departments should be included initially under one roof. The implementation of this proposal would facilitate the implementation of earlier proposals in this report related to determination of population catchment areas and 'pairing' of neighborhood health and welfare services. On the other hand, nationalization of the social work functions would require another method of including social work in local planning efforts.

Community Organization: The Missing Link

Although community organizers (i.e. social workers specializing in community organization) are often stereotyped as rebellious, social activist professionals, whose dual loyalties to client and city hall may be politically unpredictable, it is almost impossible to understand the 'souls' of our urban neighborhoods without them. This is not the place to describe the functions of the community organization workers, but it must be clear that this is the glue that enables good planning and sensitivity of municipalities to the grass-roots situation in the neighborhoods.

It is surprising, therefore, to find that this professional group is missing in the Tel Aviv municipal apparatus. Whatever traces of community work exist seem

to suffer from intra-departmental competition and personality problems, but even these are dwarfed by the crucial need for expanding the community organization function. These professionals are necessary for working with neighborhood committees, for chairing or helping to establish the neighborhood Planning Councils, and for providing accurate information on community needs. These functions cannot be replaced by any other type of municipal service.

Experimentation Needed

The suggestions and options proposed in this paper should by no means be interpreted to be 'final truths'. Unfortunately, social service planning, because of the changing nature of society and social and political developments, can only suggest options for experimentation. What is 'good' for one community may not fit another community. But, at the same time, cities cannot permit events to overtake them, and wait passively until things get so difficult that social planning becomes a spontaneous, gut-reaction to events. Social planning must anticipate events, and experimentation is the vehicle for good planning.

What seems most needed now in Israeli municipal affairs is not really ingenious new conceptions, but leadership and courage to experiment with change.

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